

## Living Modestly

The principle of living modestly and not drowning oneself in pleasure, material acquisitions and the life of this world is an enlightened and constructive principle that uncovers man's potential and allows his spirit to soar. The extent to which man pays attention to material embellishments and the more his ties to this world increase, the more he is deprived of spiritual pleasures, radiant wisdom and inner light.

Spiritual men of God, who have high goals and lofty destinations in sight, never tie themselves down to the embellishments of this world. They realize that being attached to worldly pleasures and attaining spiritual perfection are like the East and the West; when a person gets close to one of them, in reality he has moved away from the other. For this reason spiritually minded persons apply themselves totally in trying to reach proximity to God which is the goal of creation.

They do not waste their valuable lives on worthless matters, for arriving at this exalted destination is not possible without living modestly and expressing disinterest in matters related to this world.

Of course what we have said here does not contradict things like developing society or making progress in various fields of knowledge, handicraft and industry, all of which are amongst man's duties in this material world. Rather, that which is objectionable consists of two things: the first is being attached to worldly affairs [in other words, this world becomes the goal rather than a means for accomplishing a higher goal, realized in the Afterlife] and one's heart becomes tied to transient favors. The second is becoming drowned in pleasures and having a luxurious lifestyle.

The Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings be upon him and his family), the greatest role model for all of mankind, paid careful attention to the principle of living modestly and in this way, guided mankind toward the vast possibilities of spiritual advancement. A point worth making here is that the principle of simplicity is a relative principle that differs with regards to time and conditions. It is possible that a particular lifestyle might be considered very comfortable under particular circumstances and that same lifestyle, under different circumstances, due to changes in society, might be regarded as simple.

Therefore, when it is said that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) lived a simple life and that we should make him our role model, this does not mean that our homes, method of

transportation, food and clothes should be exactly like his in terms of quality and quantity. Rather, what is intended is that the current general understanding of people today regarding present conditions, changes and advancements in technology must be taken into consideration in order to determine what type of lifestyle is considered simple and free of hassle.

In other words, from this principle one should not draw the conclusion that since the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family), for example, lived in a house made of clay or ate out of dishes made of clay or rode a particular animal, one should do the same today. Rather, what is important is observing the principle of living simply while paying attention to the particular present conditions of time and place. Some aspects of the simplicity of the Noble Prophet's lifestyle will now be discussed.

1. Anas ibn Malik has said, *"The Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) would not eat out of a tray or a platter, nor would he eat thin, refined white bread (apparently the food of the elite of that time)."*<sup>[1](#)</sup>

2. 'Aishah (the Prophet's wife) has said, *"The Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) would never eat his fill."*<sup>[2](#)</sup>

3. Imam al-Baqir (peace be upon him) has said, *"Halva (a jellylike sweet) was brought to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) but he refused to eat it. He was asked: 'Do you consider this to be forbidden?' He said, 'No, but I despise (getting used to it and) craving it.' Then he read the verse of the Qur'an that says, 'You did away with pure food in your life in this world'."*<sup>[3](#)</sup>

4. Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him), describing the Great Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, *"He took only that which he absolutely required from this world and he did not take the smallest look at it. He had the thinnest waist and the hungriest stomach of all the people of this world. He (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) would eat on the floor, sit like a slave, mend his shoes with his own hands, patch his clothes with his own hands, ride a bare donkey (without a saddle), seat another person behind him and when there was a design on the curtain hanging on the door of his house, he said to one of his wives, 'O so-and-so, take it away from my sight, for when I look at it I remember this world and its embellishments'."*<sup>[4](#)</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Makarim al-Akhlaq, vol. 1, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup>. Majmu'ah Warram, vol. 1, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup>. Mahasin, p. 343.

<sup>4</sup>. Nahj al Balaghah, sermon 159.

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